My research takes as its point of departure the assumption that modern education also contributes to sustaining gender roles and relationships that are mostly discriminatory towards women. Gender is the boxing-up of all persons into the socially constructed dichotomies of boys and girls, men and women; which also conveys certain roles and relationships that are socially compulsive.

There is an emerging trend of scholarship that proposes that it is erroneous to assume that every normal conception (biological) must bring forth either a male or female; and proposes that sex be understood as a continuum between male and female. This school of thought critiques present gender socialisations, even in the most civilised contexts. In many parts of the developing world, gender socialisation is problematic not just because of the dichotomies created, but also due to harsh conditions to which women and girls are subjected, through the condoning of domestic violence, restrictions on what they can achieve, preferential treatment of boy, gender stereotypes, and many more.

The choices of words, imagery, pictures and layout in textbooks have been found by many scholars to be influenced by the degree of socio-cultural gender dynamics in almost all parts of the world. Ghana and Kenya are two countries in the developing world that present unique social contexts for interesting gender analysis. This fellowship focused on understanding how the choices of words and imagery in textbooks in both Ghana and Kenya are sensitive to gender and equality dynamics. The different gender dynamics in Ghana and Kenya have somewhat affected enrolment and completion rates of both boys and girls, although the extent of their impact is debatable. Whilst these rates at primary schools have increased for both boys and girls in Ghana since the year 2000, the completion rate for boys is comparatively lower in Kenya, according to statistics from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This informed my choice of Ghana and Kenya for the study.

Whilst I acknowledge that formal education alone cannot provide explanations for pronounced differences in gender roles and relationships, I was convinced by the end of the fellowship that it also plays a significant role. A number of studies have confirmed that gender insensitivity in textbooks can have negative consequences on the development and wellbeing of girls. Myrad Sadker and David Sadker, for instance, have widely been quoted as saying: “Each time a girl opens a book and reads a womanless history, she learns she is worthless”.

Textbooks have become so important in school life that their contents can no longer be left unscrutinised, even though some scholars believe the centrality of textbooks in students’ lives in developing countries to have been overestimated. Formal education itself is not yet universally available in many developing countries; however, the impact of education on the socialisation of peoples is clear. Even though there are more children out of school than in, and even though those in schools may not have direct access to textbooks due to the governmental inability to fund the pro-
duction and distribution to each child, there is proof that teachers rely heavily on textbooks to prepare and deliver lessons. Further, the representation of gender biases in textbooks and other educational materials is so subtle that it takes extremely critical minds to detect them in many cases. This is because the suppressive nature of gender socialisation has become a structural problem, so deep-seated that both men and women contribute to the systems that bring them about.

Although a review of gender representation in all textbooks would be ideal, this study was limited to the review of primary social studies textbooks for Kenya, and citizenship education textbooks for Ghana. In Ghana, social studies is only taught at the secondary level of education, rendering citizenship education the closest subject studied in primary schools.

For one month during my stay in Braunschweig, I carried out an extensive review of books, journals, articles, social studies textbooks and citizenship education textbooks. I expect to have two publishable papers from my analysis: one paper on gender representations and imageries in social studies textbooks in Kenya, and another on gender representations and imageries in citizenship education textbooks in Ghana. A possible third publication would assess representations in lower primary social studies textbooks in Kenya.

My preliminary findings show that the Kenyan social studies textbooks are much more gender-balanced and -sensitive than the books from Ghana, despite a generally higher level of concern for gender issues within the country. This is in spite of the fact that Ghana touts itself as having made significant progress in addressing gender issues in all facets of national life. The analysis of the textbooks is ongoing. Future studies should address a trend analysis within gender representations in different editions of textbooks since the independence of both Ghana and Kenya. This would help trace the trends of gender representations in the countries’ education and identify the factors that have contributed to any changes. Many scholars agree that representations in educational curricula and textbooks have a significant influence on gender roles and relationships. If the new Sustainable Development Goals four and five are to be met by 2030, where all nations provide inclusive and equitable, gender-sensitive and quality educational systems for majority of its people, then such representations in textbooks must be taken seriously by curricu-lum developers.

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